

the
opera
department
university of toronto

presents

the canadian premiere of

THE
OF **SEMMINES** OF
SULPHUR

by richard rodney bennett

april 2, 3, 9, 10, 1976

macmillan theatre

edward johnson
building

8.00 p.m.

THE OPERA DEPARTMENT

presents

the Canadian premiere of

THE **MINES** OF **SULPHUR**

*An opera in three acts**

by Richard Rodney Bennett

Libretto by Beverley Cross

Conductor

Director

Designer and Scenic Artist

Lighting Designer

Assistant Conductor

Assistant Director

STEFAN GYARTO

HERMAN GEIGER-TOREL

ELSIE SAWCHUK

RON SNIPPE

DEREK BATE

THOMAS SCHWEITZER

CAST in order of appearance

	APRIL 2, 10	APRIL 3, 9
WILLIAM BRAXTON, <i>a landowner</i>	Douglas McEachen	John Nieboer
ROSALIND, <i>a gypsy</i>	Susan Gudgeon	Susan Pautz
BOCCONION, <i>a deserter</i>	Stephen Young	John Keane
TOVEY, <i>a tramp</i>	James Shafer	Joel Katz
SHERRIN, <i>a theatre manager</i> (in the play: the Count)	Douglas McEachen	John Nieboer
JENNY, <i>an actress</i> (in the play: Haidee)	Nancy Hermiston	Rosemarie Landry
LEDA, <i>an actress</i> (in the play: Mrs. Traxel)	Patricia Harton	Jean MacPhail
FENNEY, <i>an actor</i> (in the play: Hugo)	Richard Brunner	Richard Brunner
TOOLEY, <i>an actor</i> (in the play: a Flunkey)	Mark Pedrotti	Jonas Vaskevicius
TRIM, <i>a mute</i>	Mark DuBois	Mark DuBois

There will be a fifteen minute intermission between each act.

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I

Deborah Kirshner**
Janet Krause
Niklaus Mauerer
Gisèle Dalbec
Wendy Rose
John Lowry
Julie Parcells
Hélène Barrière
Gwen Dunlop
Maureen Adams
Ermanno Florio
Monica Duschênes

VIOLIN II

George Willms*
Lorenz Hasler
Sonia Klimasko
Janet Sangwine
Adele Lappin
Giuseppe Lombardo
Valerie Legge
Ann McRuer
Douglas McNabney
Abigail Evans

VIOLA

Steven Dann*
Christopher Redsell
Burton Wathen
Janet Langley
Pamela Inkman
Arnold MacPherson
Marlene Dankiw
Sharon Fraser

VIOLONCELLO

Geneviève La Rue*
Martin Shaver
Mayda Narvey
Carol Higa
Yutaka Ozawa
Peter Rapson
John Payzant
Lindsay Burrell

DOUBLE BASS

Brian Robinson*
Viiu Varik
Roberto Occhipinti
Lena Turovsky

FLUTE, ALTO FLUTE

Penelope Clarke*
Fiona Wilkinson
Robert Bick

OBOE, COR ANGLAIS

Darrell Howard*
Anne Rubner

CLARINET, BASS CLARINET

Stephen Pierre*
Terry Storr
Rita Greer

BASSOON

Stephen Mosher*
Elizabeth Brickenden

FRENCH HORN

William Jamieson*
Andreas Brakas
Dale Skinner
Sandra Horsburgh
Gary Pattison (*backstage*)

TRUMPET

Tim Watson*
James Spragg
Neil Balm

TROMBONE

Wayne Parker*
Christopher Buller
Paul Hyman

TUBA

Dale Fawcett

TYMPANI

David Kent

PERCUSSION

Richard Skol*
Ron Hesketh
Jerry Ronson

HARP

Janice Lindskoog

PIANO, HARPSICHORD CELESTE

Jane Solose

**Concert Master

*Principal

THE MINES OF SULPHUR

On a winter's night some two hundred years ago, in a remote region of the English West country, the aged master of a crumbling manor house is murdered by an army deserter, assisted by a tramp, and spurred on by a gypsy girl who had been the object of the hated old man's affections. Before making off with their victim's valuables, the vagabonds play at lord and lady, muse on their guilt, and look to a new life in America. They are startled by a troupe of passing players who appear at the house, seeking shelter for the night. In return, the actors present a comedy, *The Mines of Sulphur*. We never find out why it is a "comedy", for it turns out to be a re-enactment of the grisly reality which had just taken place. Exposed in their crime, the fascination of the gypsies gives way to horror. They halt the play. The swaggering murderer Boconnion decides to kill the visitors too, and burn the house down to destroy every evidence.

Here sordid realism is transformed into the supernatural, as we realize the strolling actors were not real people at all, but only phantoms: these same players had entertained at that very manor house a hundred years ago. Like the play within a play, this scene is once again a re-enactment. The actors mysteriously disappear delivering the three criminals to their fate. Iago's lines from *Othello* (III, iii) have been realized:

*"Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But, with a little, act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur . . ."*

Whether one takes all of this as a very concentrated melodrama à la Poe or Grand Guignol, or sees in it a psychological study of the workings of guilt, or indeed, whether one reads into the tale lurid overtones of man's own crimes and looming catastrophe ("man is alone — no God can forgive, or punish, or deny, or rescue him"), the libretto admirably fulfils the composer's expressed intent — something "violent, pestilential, sinister". And it offers tremendous scope for effective theatrical devices and varied musical forms and counterparts to portray these: masquerade, play within a play, murder, lust, a suspenseful morality play outcome, the macabre and supernatural, the conflict between the actors and the "real" people, and even humour (Act II). The characters are starkly drawn; none really plays a minor role, not even the mute Trim.

Corresponding to the dramatic requirements, the carefully controlled musical structure is divided into forty numbers, which not only drive the intensity onwards but also isolate scenes as calculated breaks in the continuity. A large array of forms and techniques are employed, reminiscent of Berg's *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*. Recitative and aria are integrated, to avoid too much separation between the sung and spoken word. Recurring motives, such as the canon between Jenny and Rosalind concluding the first act which recurs in Haidee's song in the second act and again as Jenny's farewell, the mysterious horn call, and of course the second act's musical references to the first, are of telling dramatic effect. The large orchestra, used with great deftness and finesse, is often broken down into chamber music groups.

The composer, Richard Rodney Bennett, born in Kent, England, in 1936, studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Lennox Berkeley and Howard Ferguson, and then went through the avant garde mill for two years with Pierre Boulez in Paris. Tonight's opera — the first full length opera by the then 27 year old composer — was commissioned by the Sadler's Wells in London, where it received its première in 1965. It is dedicated to Benjamin Britten, whom the composer much admires. Acclaim has followed upon the *Mines'* presentations in Paris, Milan, Zagreb, Stockholm, Cologne, and New York.

Bennett has shown himself to be a remarkably prolific and versatile composer, having to his credit not only several other operas, a piano sonata and concerto, an oboe concerto, symphonies, string quartets, works for piano, chamber ensembles, and voices, but also almost forty scores for films (Peter Sellers included), theatre, and television. Quite an extraordinary output for a composer just turned forty!

His Oxford-educated librettist, Beverley Cross, has enjoyed much success as a novelist, actor, and playwright.

Edward C. Laufer

NEXT OPERA EVENT: Three complete one-act operas: *Prima Donna* (Arthur Benjamin), *Amelia Goes to the Ball* (Gian-Carlo Menotti), *Gallantry* (Douglas Moore); scenes from works by Giordano, Massenet, Offenbach, Donizetti, Mozart, R. Strauss, Scarlatti, Tchaikowsky and Verdi, all fully staged in costume. May 25, 26, 27, 28, 1976, 8:00 p.m. MacMillan Theatre, Edward Johnson Building. General admission (no reserved seats) \$2.00; \$1.00 students, senior citizens. Seats on sale night of performance, 7:15 p.m. For further information, call 978-3744.

NEXT EVENT: The Remeny Competition, May 8, 1976, 8:15 p.m. in Walter Hall. Violin students of the Faculty of Music compete for the prize of a violin built by a contemporary master, donated by Mr. Michael Remeny. Open to the public. No tickets, no charge.

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